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ABSTRACT

Thinking skills and performance skills are compatible, and actors and directors should learn them both. If there are to be advances in performing arts there must be a clearer understanding of the processes of thinking and the practices of performing. Efforts to define thinking skills have tended to categorize the skills into four camps: critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, and decision making. Each of the kinds of thinking skills has a strategy or plan which allows the thinker to define issues or problems, generate ideas, prepare a plan and take action. Guided Design is a decision-making process which provides a procedure for solving open-ended problems or making group decisions. Finding problems to solve by adapting the Guided Design thinking strategy heightens interest and improves communication in the classroom, as well as among cast members and between performers and the director. Group decision making helps clarify objectives, identify goals, identify sources of information, and provide a meaningful way for making choices and taking action. If better thinkers are to be produced from performance studies in theatre arts it is necessary to know more about thinking skills--critical and creative, problem solving and decision making. (Two figures are included and 15 references are attached.) (RAE)

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PERFORMANCE AND THINKING SKILLS: THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE CONSCIOUS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

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Some years ago as a student actor I was cast in the role of Reverend John Hale in Arthur Miller's The Crucible. For me, it was a crucible in more ways than one. I had just about digested an introduction to Stanislavski's approach to acting. For some roles it had worked well, but this time it did not. The character of John Hale eluded me. Everything I tried seemed false. Relaxation of muscles, concentration of attention, emotion memory, imaginary circumstances, the magic "if" -- Stanislavski's fundamentals weren't working. What was causing the delay? The director was impatient. He did not adhere to Stanislavski's principles anyway. Finally, at one rehearsal, in exasperation, he stopped the scene, looked at me and said, "Why don't you stop thinking and just do it?" So I did. I memorized everything, just did it, and he was satisfied. But I was not. It was a most difficult time. I felt uncomfortable and never really knew what I was doing. I had stopped thinking. At each performance I had a fear of going blank. I don't know if rote memory worked for the benefit of that production but it is difficult to forget that agonizing experience. Looking back now I believe the problem was not properly identified. Therefore, it could not properly be solved. This leads me to the topic.

What kinds of thinking go on in the processes of acting and directing? What is the relationship between actor and director? How do they communicate? Why is it important to be concerned about these processes and relationships? How can teaching and learning in acting and directing be improved?

My thesis is that thinking skills and performance skills are

compatible. Actors and directors should learn both. If there are to be advances in performing arts there must be a clearer understanding of the processes of thinking and the practices of performing. For college students in a liberal arts program, the use of thinking skills may outlast theatre practice because so many students go on to other careers and professions. For those who go on to careers in theatre performance, skills without thinking skills may limit their ability to continue to learn and grow in their profession.

First, consider what is meant by thinking skills and how they fit into teaching acting and directing. Then, an example will follow to illustrate how thinking skills can be adapted to performance studies. Finally, a few observations about creativity.

Recently, there has been a revival of interest in teaching thinking skills as a major goal in American education. This is the result of several factors. There were numerous reports between 1983 and 1985 which indicated that schools were producing poor thinkers. A report by the National Science Board Commission in 1983 said, " We must return to basics, but the `basics' of the 21st century are not only reading, writing, and arithmetic. They include communication and higher order problem-solving skills, and scientific and technological literacy -- the thinking tools that allow us to understand the technological world around us" (National Science Board Commission, 1983). Scores on national assessment of education progress tests confirmed that achievement in higher order processes for all but the top ten percent of American youth was a problem (Mullis, 1984). There was concern that Japan as a major industrial and technological power would

outstrip the nation's intellectual capacity and productive energy (Lohr, 1984; Ranbom, 1985). There were also the distractions of modern living which seemed to threaten strong academic achievement. Increased television viewing was taking time away from reading activities and homework. Divorces were breaking up the unity of the family. There was increased poverty, crime and social distress for children and parents alike (Presseisen, 1986).

During the past five or six years much attention has been given to the need to incorporate thinking skills into the college curriculum but tradition is not easily changed. The prevailing method of instruction is still lecture and recall of information.

Efforts to define thinking skills have tended to categorize the skills into four camps: critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, and decision making, although there are other ways of thinking about thinking. The broadest definition is a holistic one which views all of these skills as complementing each other in situations where they are best used. All encourage active participation rather than passive listening.

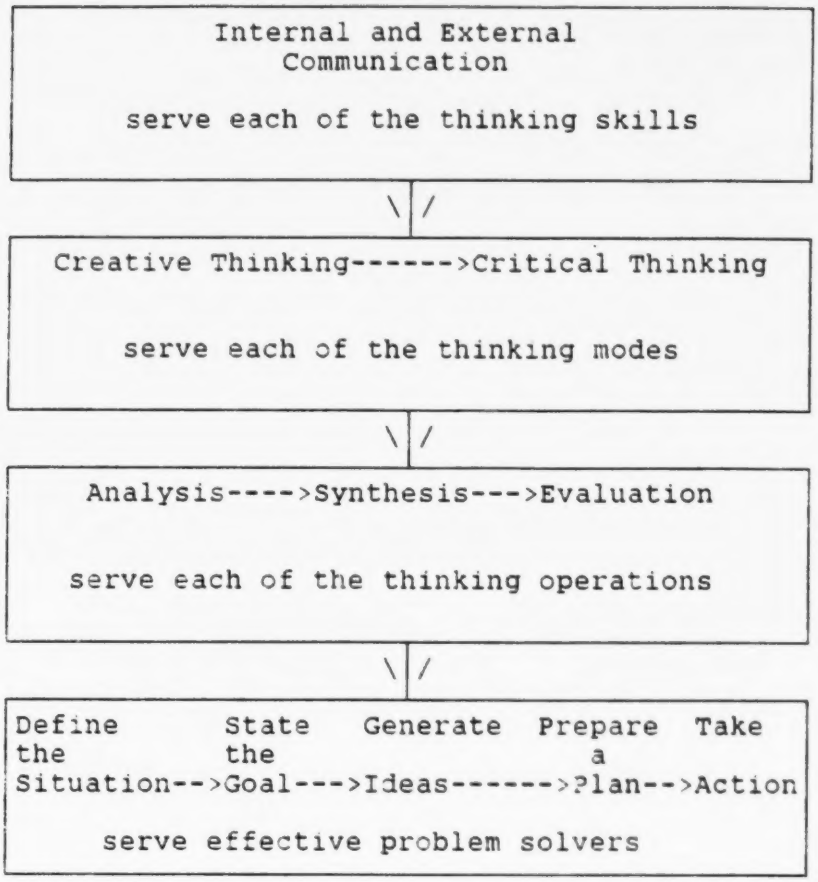
Each of the kinds of thinking skills mentioned above has a strategy or plan which allows the thinker to define issues or problems, generate ideas, prepare a plan and take action. One strategy is called Guided Design, a decision making process which provides a procedure for solving open ended problems or making group decisions. This strategy allows students to participate in thinking rather than merely accept the thinking done by the instructor; it requires discussion of facts, assumptions, opinions; it provides a way of recognizing alternatives and patterns; it facilitates decision making; it calls for action.

Wales, Nardi, and Stager have outlined a hierarchy of thinking strategies in a diagram (Figure 1).

The authors, however, warn that the arrows and lines in the chart are not one-way streets. This is only a roadmap showing the general flow of thinking traffic, but getting from the first question or creative thought to the final critical evaluation of the action may be complex, taking turns, backing up, getting directions, and so on. But the hierarchy of relationships remains.

When comparing this hierarchy to theories of acting and directing there are distinct similarities. One sees the combination of rational plans with intuitive thoughts. For example in An Actor Prepares Stanislavski says, "It is only when an actor feels that his inner and outer life on stage is flowing naturally and normally, in the circumstances that surround him, that the deeper sources of his subconscious gently open, and from them come feelings we cannot always analyse." (Stanislavski, 1952). He advises that in order to avoid breaking the laws of normal organic life where the subconscious becomes alarmed and withdraws, the actor should play his role consciously at first, then play it truthfully. He insists that "all action in the theatre must have an inner justification, be logical, coherent, and real." This idea corresponds to the internal and external communication in the thinking skills hierarchy. Thinking skills and acting described by Stanislavski also bear resemblance in breaking up the whole into units and objectives and keeping in mind the super-objective or overall statement of the goal.

FIGURE 1 *


Internal and External Communication
serve each of the thinking skills
Creative Thinking------>Critical Thinking
serve each of the thinking modes
Analysis---->Synthesis--->Evaluation
serve each of the thinking operations
Define the Situation-->State the Goal--->Generate Ideas------>Prepare a Plan-->Take Action
serve effective problem solvers

*Wales, Nardi, Stager. Thinking Skills: Making a Choice, 1987.

Stating the goal is one of the thinking operations for solving problems.

Paradoxically, it would seem, Viola Spolin in Improvisation for the Theater considers the intuitive the most vital to the learning situation and the most neglected. She gives less attention to the physical and the intellectual skills. She says that it is through spontaneity that we are re-formed into ourselves and freed from handed-down frames of reference, memory choked with old facts and information and undigested theories and techniques of other peoples findings. (Spolin, 1963). She believes what is most important is the actuality of communication more than the method used, and that styles in theatre change radically with the passing of years. She emphasizes "giving problems to solve problems" and uses "point of concentration" and "evaluation" as means for encouraging spontaneity and promoting mutual understanding rather than explaining "how to do it." She applies this theory to directing as well as acting.

Other theories , the Alexander technique, for example, focuses on the physical. Exercises to relax muscular tensions and to control gestures, muscles, and movements are used to free the performer from unwanted physical constraints.

Kristin Linklater uses Shakespeare's sonnets to help train voices and improve interpretation. She insists that vocal interpretation of lines comes not only from the brain but from the "gut" as well. What I believe she means is that because the nervous system connects the brain with bodily organs, thinking is a constant two way communication between sensory organs, muscles,

and the brain. Thinking does not go on exclusively inside the head. It includes the whole nervous system. One might add that the creative and critical sides of the brain also are in constant communication sending messages back and forth.

ADAPTING GUIDED DESIGN

Finding problems to solve by adapting the Guided Design thinking strategy heightens interest and improves communication in the classroom as well as among cast members and between performers and the director. Group decision making helps clarify objectives, identify goals, identify sources of information, provide a meaningful way for making choices and taking action.

EXAMPLE

A problem adapted from Think Tank Theatre is called "Falling Stars." (Borchardt, 1984). It was originally intended to involve students actively in a theatre history class but because it concerns acting and directing on an elementary level it may be an appropriate illustration to use here. It is a simplified problem using parts of the thinking strategy. It combines critical/analytical thinking and creative thinking. Because of the hypothetical nature of the situation students are asked to "suspend disbelief" for the sake of the exercise.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

To begin, the problem has four learning objectives:

1. To demonstrate practical aspects of staging resulting from the Realistic and Naturalistic Movements of the late 19th century.
2. To illustrate the influence of "things" (objects

such as furniture and hand properties) on acting and directing.

3. To compare selected aspects of realistic comedy.
4. To understand thematic implications of realism expressed by characters in Anton Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard and George Bernard Shaw's Arms and the Man.

STUDY GUIDE

The above objectives are what students are expected to be able to do after having completed the problem. A Study Guide lists sources for gathering information. This problem includes the two plays, articles on Stanislavski's rehearsals of The Seagull and other Chekhov plays, two cassette lectures on The Cherry Orchard and Uncle Vanya and a motion picture of Uncle Vanya with Laurence Olivier, Michael Redgrave, Joan Plowright, and Rosemary Harris.

HYPOTHETICAL SITUATION

The following situation is hypothesized to stimulate interest in an historical consideration of the beginnings of realistic acting and directing. It is an attempt to accomplish two things: Point out the context in which realism began; and, point out the practical problems of acting and directing with hand properties and stage settings. It proceeds with Instructions to which the group must respond before going on to read the Feedback. The Feedback is not the correct answer but it may influence the group response. The work then proceeds to the next Instruction.

The imaginary situation assumes that Stanislavski would and

could assemble some of the prominent world performers of the latter part of the 19th and early part of the 20th century. The performers include Sarah Bernhardt, Benont Constant Coquelin, Elenora Duse and Tommaso Salvini. They come from a tradition of acting unlike that proposed by Stanislavski. He wants to cast them in The Cherry Orchard and Arms and the Man. It is a given that they can all speak one language.

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

The first Instruction in this situation is to identify the problem assuming you were members of the Moscow Art Theatre at this time. Note that this is the first of the Guided Design thinking operations -- define the situation, and the second operation as well -- state the goal. This can be stated in one sentence or it can be separated into two. This requires thought, discussion, and a consensus. It should include the thinking modes analysis, synthesis, evaluation. Analysis looks at the component parts and asks who, what, where, when, why, and how. Synthesis considers a "putting together" with what "could be" or "should be" in mind. Evaluation is an assessment of how well the statement or statements suit the situation. Comparison is then made with the Feedback which states, "The problem was (for Stanislavski and his company) to find a way to demonstrate the need for a "realistic " style of acting. There are obviously other ways of stating the problem and the goal but the comparison may help to modify the consensus statement.

The second Instruction calls for information needed. It suggests script requirements which include descriptions of the

stage furniture, architectural aspects of the setting, and hand properties. It also suggests an analysis of the play for deciding the who, what, where, when, why, and how in each scene. Also, there is consideration of acting and directorial motivations for facing positions, standing or sitting positions, and movements toward or away from objects, windows, doors, or other parts of the stage environment. Assumptions can also be made about the setting within a larger context, for example a room within the house, located in the countryside, in Russia.

The Feedback to this instruction lists realistic requirements from two pages of Act I to serve as an example. When listed, it is discovered that the playwright has included many realistic details about properties, setting, and actions (Figure 2).

CHOOSE POSSIBLE SOLUTION

The third Instruction -- "Possible solution, implementation, evaluation" combines the Guided Design steps of generate ideas, prepare a plan, and take action. This is the creative part of the problem. The analytical thinking necessary to define the problem and gather information is now common to all participants. Although there may be other ways to solve the problem the one suggested is that a scene be chosen so that the performers can improvise with the help of a director. The plan includes placement of furniture, exits and entrances and hand properties. When students become involved in the improvisation of a scene it becomes clear that the style of acting is greatly influenced by the realistic details. Any rhetorical or presentational style of acting would have to be modified considerably.

FIGURE 2*

1. REALISTIC REQUIREMENTS
   a. A room called the nursery.
   b. Door leading to Anya's room.
   c. Windows through which can be seen cherry trees in flower, and effect of sunrise can be seen.
   d. An outside door.
   e. "Adjoining rooms."
   f. Dunyasha carries a candle.
   g. Lopahin carries a book.
   h. Epihodov carries a nosegay.
   i. Dunyasha brings Epihodov some "kvass."
   j. Epihodov stumbles over a chair.
   k. Sound of carriages driving up to the house.
   l. Firs leans on a stick.
   m. Charlotta enters with a pet dog on a chain.
   n. Others enter with bags, parasol, other articles.
2. ENTRANCES AND EXITS
   a. Dunyasha enters with a candle. Where has she been? Why does she put out the candle?
   b. Lopahin enters from another room and carries a book. Where was he? What has he been doing?
   c. Epihodov comes in from the chilly outdoors. He carries a nosegay given him by the gardener for the dining room. Gives it to Dunyasha and asks for "kvass."
   d. Dunyasha goes out and comes back in.
   e. Epihodov gets "kvass" from Dunyasha, stumbles over chair, goes out, probably to another room.
   f. Madame Ranevsky, Anya, Charlotta, Gaev, Pishtchik, Lopahin and Dunyasha enter from outside.
3. REACTIONS TO THINGS (stage business) a. Dunyasha and candle.
   b. Lopahin and book.
   c. Epihodov and nosegay. Also "kvass" and "chair."
   d. Firs and "stick."
   e. Others and bags, parasol, pet dog, the nursery as they enter.
4. STANDING AND SITTING
   All characters would be standing. Lopahin may sit to page through his book. They would be motivated by sounds, temperature, window, doors from outside, and other rooms. Tables and chairs would have to be placed.

*Borchardt, Think Tank Theatre, 1984.

EVALUATE

The final Feedback for this problem is the evaluation of the effectiveness of this approach. And for the students it includes discussion and assessment of how well the learning objectives were satisfied. This same procedure would apply to solving the problem for Shaw's Arms and the Man as well.

In summary it is clear that this is a slowed down process for solving a problem. By actively participating in the step-by-step group decision making strategy students recognize that both critical and creative thinking are necessary in performing arts, and they are made aware of the problem solving process. This is guided by a series of instructions and feedbacks. The communication between instructor and students as well as between director and performers is two-way. There is mutual give-and-take while identifying problems, generating ideas backed by facts, assumptions, and opinions. Students are encouraged to think for themselves and to understand that "thinking about thinking" may lead to intuitive and patterned approaches with new perspectives to the art of acting and directing.

The crucible I found myself in the role of John Hale was not, I believe, the result of too much thinking. Rather, it was the result of a lack of knowledge about thinking skills and lack of experience in applying them. Emphasis on doing does not always develop a conscious awareness of thinking skills. Without conscious awareness students can be left with improved intuitive skills but deficient knowledge of other necessary and related thinking processes. Conscious development of performance skills

is a necessary phase in progressing toward the goal of unconscious use of the skills. James L. Adams in The Care & Feeding of Ideas illustrates the development from unconscious incompetence in problem solving to unconscious competence (Figure 3).

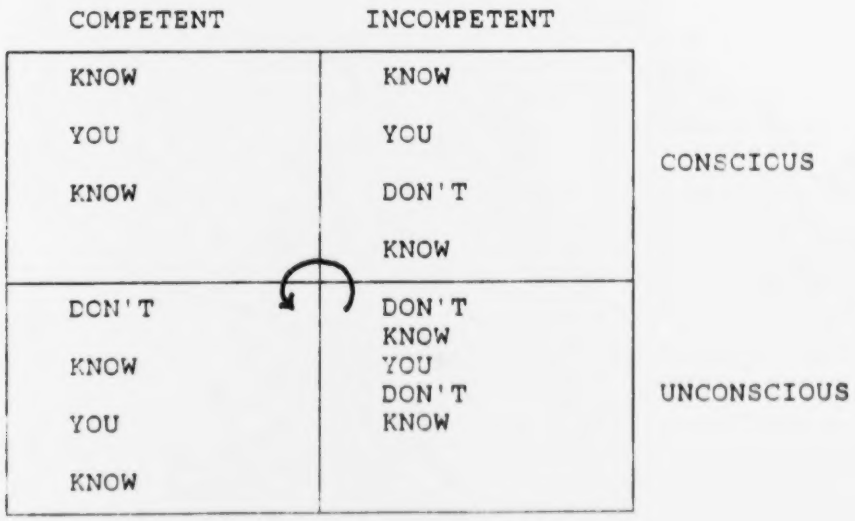
Why is it important to be concerned with these processes and relationships? How can teaching and learning in acting and directing be improved? The answer to the first question is that we still don't know everything there is to know about thinking processes. If we are to produce better thinkers from performance studies in theatre arts we need to know more about thinking skills -- critical and creative, problem solving and decision making.

OBSERVATIONS ON CREATIVITY

Some of the conceptions and misconceptions about creativity have been researched and clarified. We know that creativity is found not only in the arts but it is found in science, business and the professions. It is not simply "doing your own thing" but it means being open to new ideas while dealing with problems and issues. It is not exclusive to people with high intelligent quotient scores partly because IQ tests were not meant to measure creativity. Most high achievers in creativity fall below the 135 genius score. Creativity requires no special talents, only the application of talents virtually everyone has (Ruggiero, 1988). We know that it is a misconception to think that creative people can achieve without effort, or that the use of drugs enhances creativity. Psychologist Harold Anderson, after citing respected authorities such as Erich Fromm, Rollo May, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, J.P. Gilford, and Ernest Hilgard, concludes, "The

FIGURE 3 *

From Unconscious Incompetence in Problem Solving
to Unconscious Competence



*Adams, The Care & Feeding of Ideas, 1986.

consensus of these authors is that creativity is an expression of a mentally or psychologically healthy person, that creativity is associated with wholeness, unity, honesty, integrity, personal involvement, enthusiasm, high motivation, and action" (Anderson, 1959). Knowing this, we need to explore the latest developments in "thinking" and learn how to apply the principles to skills in acting and directing. I believe we have only begun to see some of the possibilities.

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